

*A Resource Book for Teachers*

# SIKHISM

**A Pictorial Guide**







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# SIKHISM

## A Pictorial Guide

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## INTRODUCTION

Sikhism is one of the smaller religions in terms of the number of Sikhs worldwide, but in Britain it is the third largest faith community after Christianity and Islam, with an estimated 200,000 active followers. It is a practical religion and a way of life.

*It proclaims human equality, the futility of caste, sex and racial prejudice, the fruitlessness of idol worship and it discredits claims to Godship.*

*It lays stress on the worship of one god and the living of a high spiritual life based on the principles laid down and practically demonstrated by the Gurus in their lives on this earth.*

*(A Brief Introduction to Sikhism by G.S.Sidhu)*

Sikhism began in the Punjab, the upper part of the valley and plain of the River Indus. The word Punjab means 'five streams': the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej which flow into the Indus. When India and Pakistan became independent in 1947 the boundary between them cut right through the historic homeland of the Sikhs so that Lahore, the ancient capital of the Sikhs, is in Pakistan but Amritsar, the site of the most famous Sikh temple, is in India.

Understandably, some Sikhs feel that there should be a separate Sikh state between India and Pakistan. They would like to call this independent Sikh state Khalistan, the 'Land of the Khalsa' (see page 6 for the origins of the Khalsa, the brotherhood of pure Sikhs).

Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak, born at Nankana Sahib near Lahore in 1469. He was followed by nine more Gurus but the Tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, decreed that his successor should be the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book containing the hymns and teaching of the earlier Gurus. This is now the foundation of Sikhism, considered by Sikhs to be the living voice of God. Sikhs will not bow to any living person but only to the Holy Granth. The name Sikh is derived from the word Shishya, meaning disciple. Sikhs are followers of the teachings of the Gurus.

Guru Nanak refused to accept the idea that God is to be found in an image or in a particular place. God, he taught, is present everywhere and in the human heart, and therefore religious ceremony is unimportant. He rejected

the caste system. Guru Gobind Singh said 'Know that all mankind is one caste'.

Animal sacrifice is also condemned. No importance is attached to the practices of feasting, fasting, pilgrimage or ritual washing.

In Sikhism there is complete equality between the sexes. Women have the same rights as men: they can conduct services, read the Holy Granth in public and vote on community matters.

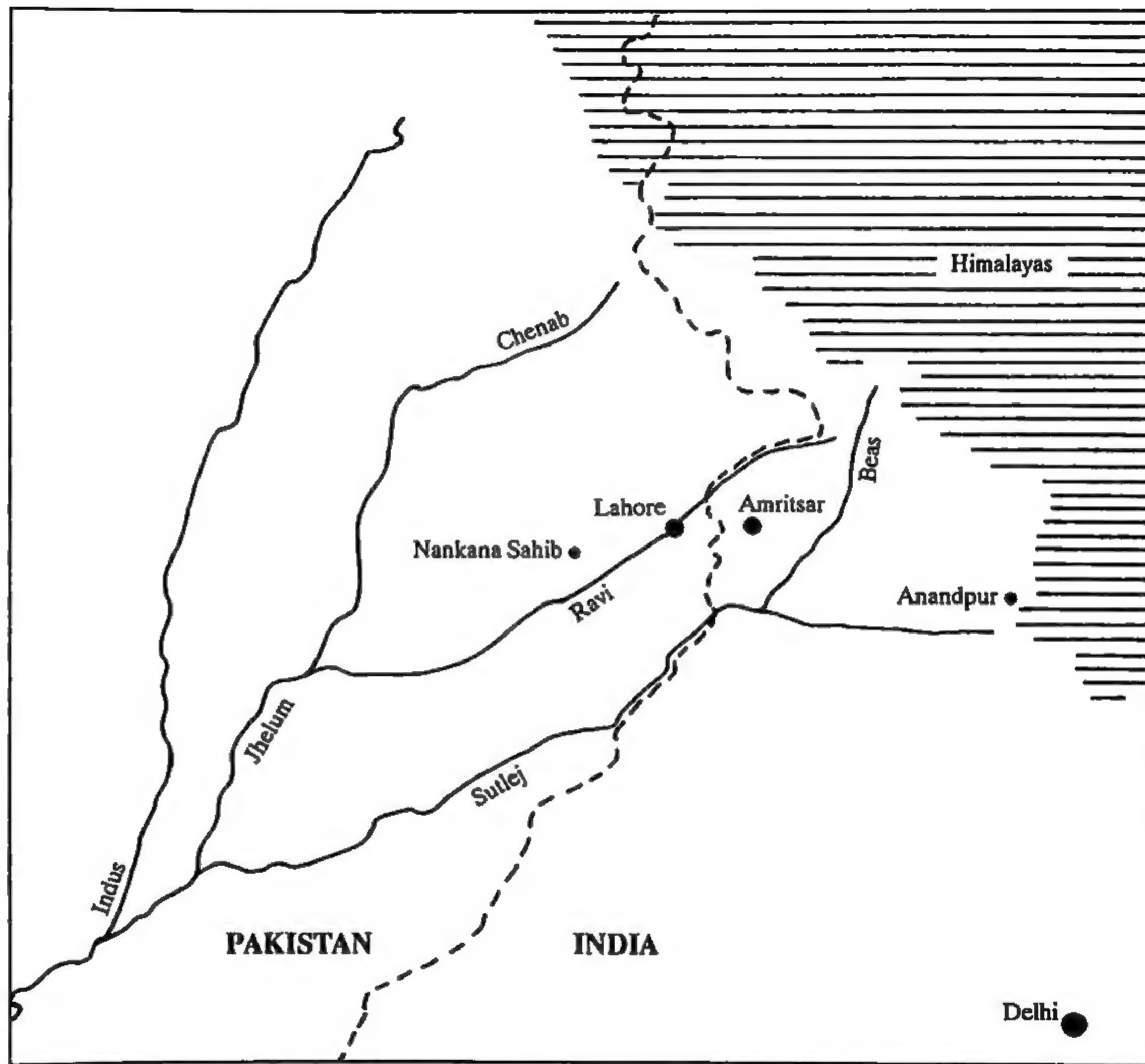
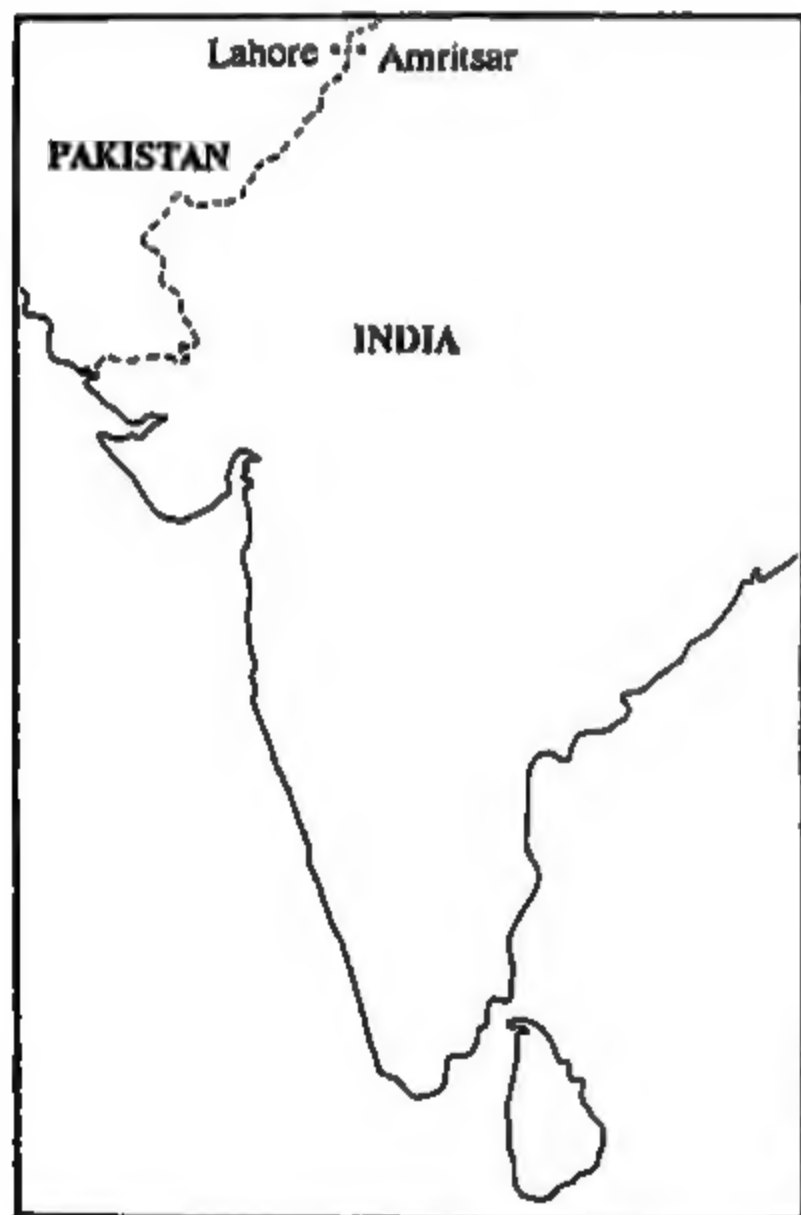
Sikhs seek to live peaceably with all peoples but are prepared to fight for their faith and to defend the oppressed.

*The purpose for which I am born is  
To spread true religion and to destroy evil doers . . .*

*Blessed are those who keep God in their hearts,  
And sword in their hands to fight for a noble cause . . .*

*When there is no other course open to man  
it is but righteous to unsheath the sword.*

*(Guru Gobind Singh)*



## THE TEN GURUS

*A Guru is one who dispels darkness and floods the soul with light*

*The true Guru is one who unites all*

### 1. Guru Nanak (1469-1539)

Guru Nanak was brought up as a Hindu but taught by a Muslim friend and companion Marana, a poet and musician. He learned much from both faiths but became increasingly impatient with the constant arguments between them and looked for a simpler faith which concentrated on essentials.

At the age of ten he refused to participate in the Hindu sacred thread ceremony. At the age of twenty-eight a spiritual experience (he was missing for three days after bathing in the river) led him to see that God is not to be found in an image, in a particular religious action or in a special place. God is present everywhere and in the human heart. He said 'There is no Hindu and no Muslim . . . I shall follow God's path'. Therefore he regarded religious ceremony as unimportant. He rejected ritual worship and, on a visit to Mecca, horrified Muslims by sleeping with his feet towards the Kaaba. He answered their protests with the words, 'I meant no disrespect to the house of God but will you kindly turn my feet to point in the direction where God is not.'

He made many disciples, visiting Burma, Arabia, Tibet and Sri Lanka. In his old age he lived at Kartapur. He was married with sons, but chose his disciple Lehna as his successor after he had shown his willingness to jump in to a muddy stream to retrieve the Guru's waterpot. Lehna's name was changed to Angad.

Jaman Sakhis are stories told about Guru Nanak.

### 2. Guru Angad (1504-1552)

He wrote down the hymns and poems of Guru Nanak in Gurmukhi (the language of the Guru), a written form of Punjabi. The most famous is the Japji which begins with the Mool Mantra, a meditative poem about God who is the TRUTH. This meant that the Guru's followers could read the teaching in their own language (not Sanskrit or Arabic as is the case with Hindus and Muslims). It also marked the beginning of the process of collecting the

teachings of the Gurus which was ultimately to lead to the definitive statement of Sikh teaching in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Angad founded many centres of teaching and preaching and thus did much to consolidate the work of Guru Nanak and to ensure that his teachings became more widely known.

### 3. Guru Amar Das (1479-1574)

The Third Guru is remembered especially for his concern for the poor. He was particularly active in setting up kitchens where all could eat free of charge, a tradition still carried on today in every Sikh gurdwara, which must have a langar (kitchen) to provide free meals. Even the great Mogul Emperor Akbar had to take his turn and eat with the poor when he visited the Guru.

Guru Amar Das was not only concerned with the physical needs of the poor, however. He also established twenty-two manjis (centres of preaching).

### 4. Guru Ram Das (1534-1581)

Founder of the city of Amritsar (pool of nectar).

### 5. Guru Arjan (1563-1606)

He laid the foundation of the Golden Temple of Amritsar in 1589. He also compiled the Adi-Granth, the first collection of Sikh Scriptures, which includes some of his own poems.

*I will not worship with the Hindu  
Or like the Muslim go to Mecca  
I will serve Him and no other  
I will not pray to idols or say the Muslim prayer  
I shall put my heart at the feet of the One Supreme Being  
For we are neither Hindus nor Muslims.*

(Guru Arjan)

He was the first Sikh martyr, being tortured to death by the Emperor Akbar's successor Jehangir. Jealousy had led to tales about his supposed involvement in a revolt.





## Guru Nanak

Because Sikhism is a relatively recent faith, it is possible that the likenesses of the Gurus are based on memories of what they actually looked like, which certainly cannot be said of pictures of Moses or Jesus for example. Guru Nanak always appears as a wise and kindly figure of great dignity, as shown here.

## **6. Guru Har Gobind (1595-1646)**

Following the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, the Sikhs needed to defend themselves against continued persecution by the Muslim Mogul Emperors. Guru Har Gobind was therefore the first warrior Guru, organising an effective army and successfully resisting the Moguls.

He adopted the emblem of two swords, representing spiritual and temporal power. (See **THE SIKH EMBLEM** on page 13).

## **7. Guru Har Rai (1630-1661)**

Guru Har Rai was the grandson of Guru Har Gobind and succeeded him at the age of fourteen.

## **8. Guru Har Krishnan (1656-1664)**

He was only five when he became Guru and died two years later of smallpox. He was the younger son of Har Rai, his elder son being held as a hostage at the Mogul Emperor's court.

## **9. Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675)**

The uncle of Guru Har Krishnan, he had to deal with the militant Mogul Emperor and became the second Guru martyr. He defended the rights of the Hindus and himself refused to become a Muslim. He was executed by the Emperor Aurangzeb in Delhi. The Gurdwara Sisganji was built on the site of his martyrdom.

## **10. Guru Gobind Singh (1661-1708)**

He was aged eleven when he became Guru. Called the soldier saint, he was a poet and a man of prayer and meditation. His four sons were killed when they refused to become Muslims. He founded the Khalsa, the brotherhood.

At Anandpur in April 1699 he asked for a volunteer to give his life for his Guru. Five men offered themselves one by one. After each had gone into the tent, the Guru appeared, his sword dripping with blood, asking for another volunteer. Then these five, known as the Panj Pyare, the beloved five, were seen to be still alive. The blood was the blood of a goat. Amrit (honey) was

sprinkled on them and they drank. The Guru himself was also baptised that day to show that all men are equal.

The five Ks were adopted and four vows made:

1. Not to cut the hair;
2. Not to smoke or drink alcohol;
3. Not to eat meat killed in the Jewish or Muslim way;
4. Not to harm women (no adultery).

Thus the Khalsa was founded as a brotherhood of pure Sikhs and the name Singh (lion) adopted as a symbol of membership of the brotherhood.

Although the Guru Gobind Singh had to spend much of his time fighting, his motto was 'Know that all mankind is one caste'. He was killed by assassins at Nandad in Southern India. The place is marked by the shrine known as the Takht Hazur Sahib.

He decided that his successor should be the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book finally compiled in 1705.

**Note:** Although from the Third Guru onwards the succession of Gurus remained within the same family, the office did not pass automatically to the eldest son. The choice of a successor depended not on inheritance but on the suitability of the person.

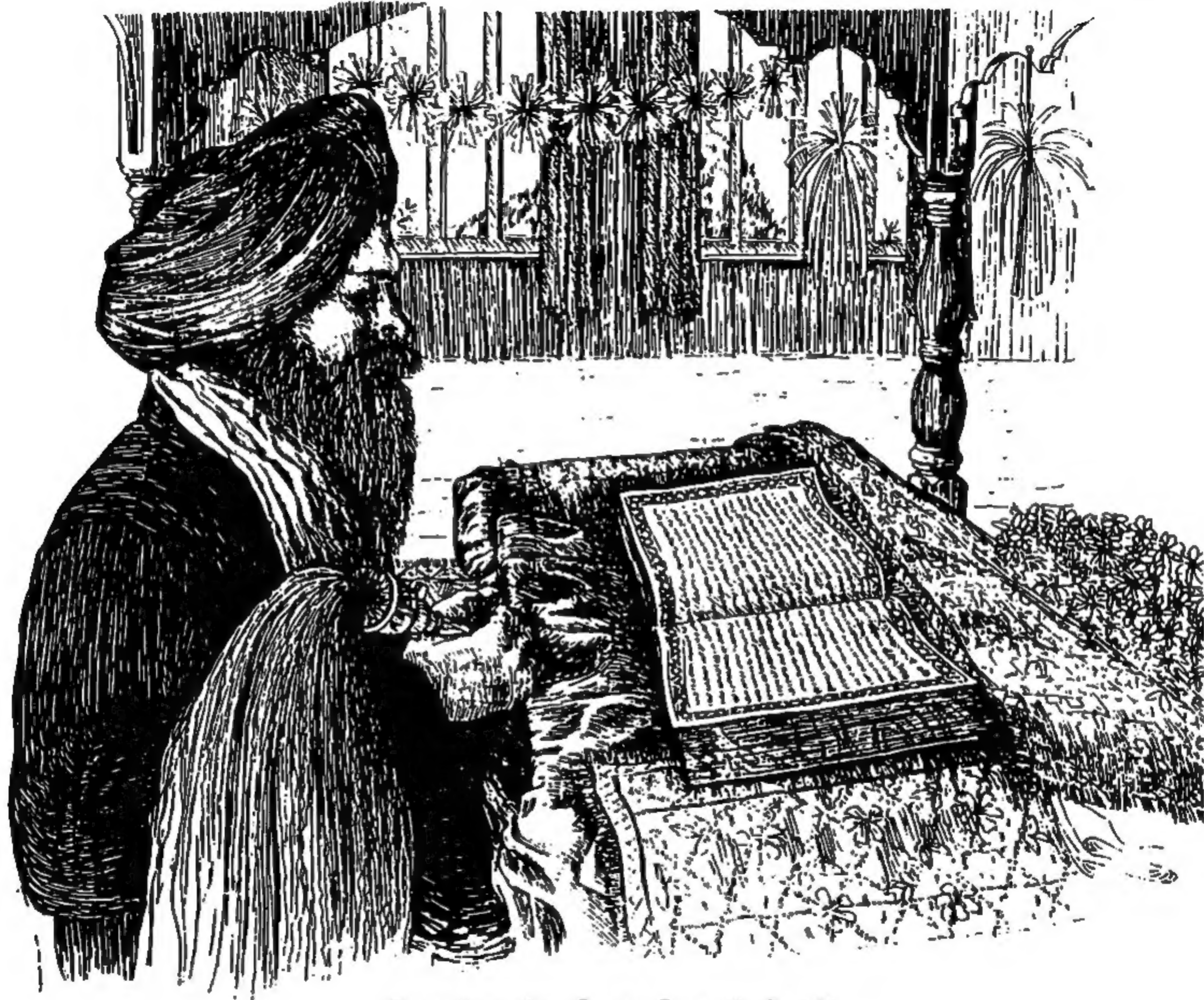


## Guru Gobind Singh

Guru Gobind Singh is here portrayed as the warrior and hunter yet his pose and the sensitivity of his face suggest also the poet and the man of prayer and meditation.







**Reading the Guru Granth Sahib**



## THE GURU GRANTH SAHIB

Guru Gobind Singh, who died in 1708, instructed that his successor should not be another human Guru but the Guru Granth Sahib, containing the teachings of the earlier Gurus together with some Hindu and Muslim writings. The creation of the Guru Granth Sahib began with the Second Guru, Angad, who was responsible for writing down many of Guru Nanak's hymns. The Fifth Guru, Arjan, took the process much further, creating the Adi Granth (meaning original book) which was, in effect, the first edition of the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Gobind Singh completed the process by adding writings of his father, the Ninth Guru.

The Guru Granth Sahib is considered by Sikhs to be the living voice of God. It is treated with the reverence due to a Guru and if a copy is owned by a family a special room in the house must be set aside for it, as for an honoured guest. No one may touch it with unwashed hands.

At the end of the service in the Gurdwara, the Guru Granth Sahib is taken from the dais and is carried on the head (the turban carefully covered by a cloth) to signify that it is above all. It is laid to rest on a canopied bed with the respect that would be shown to a Guru.

The Guru Granth Sahib opens with the Japji, a thirty-eight verse hymn by Guru Nanak. It begins with a verse known as the Mool Mantra.

*There is one God  
Eternal Truth is his Name  
Maker of all things  
Fearing nothing and hating nothing  
Immortal, unborn, self existent  
By the grace of the Guru, made known to men.*

The words of the Japji are used for morning prayer.



Carrying the Guru Granth Sahib





**Putting the Guru Granth Sahib to bed**



**Sikh with drums**

## **THE GURDWARA (GURU'S DOOR)**

The Gurdwara is not only a place of worship but also a community centre. Outside the building the yellow and blue flag (the Nishan Sahib) shows that hospitality may be obtained here.

The community kitchen (langar) offers free food to anyone, Sikh or non-Sikh, and is funded entirely by the donations of the Sikh community.

Guru Arjan said, 'Let all share equally; no one should be viewed as an outsider.' Even the Emperor Akbar had to eat with the poor when he visited Guru Amar Das, the founder of the Langar.

The management of the Gurdwara is the responsibility of an elected committee. All adult members of the Sangat (the assembly) have the right to vote.

### **Inside the Prayer Hall**

Shoes are removed and heads are covered.

Pictures of the Gurus, especially Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, will be on the wall.

At the front is a raised platform or dais (the rakht) with a canopy and cushions. It is here that the Guru Granth Sahib is placed for the readings. When not being read it is covered by a richly decorated cloth. When it is open for reading the Granthi (meaning one who reads the Granth) holds a chowri which is a sign of sovereignty and which is moved from time to time over the holy book. It is made of yak hair. It is customary for Sikhs to bow to the Granth Sahib.

Below the dais is a money box. Gifts of either money or food (e.g. milk, butter, sugar) are placed in front of the rakht.

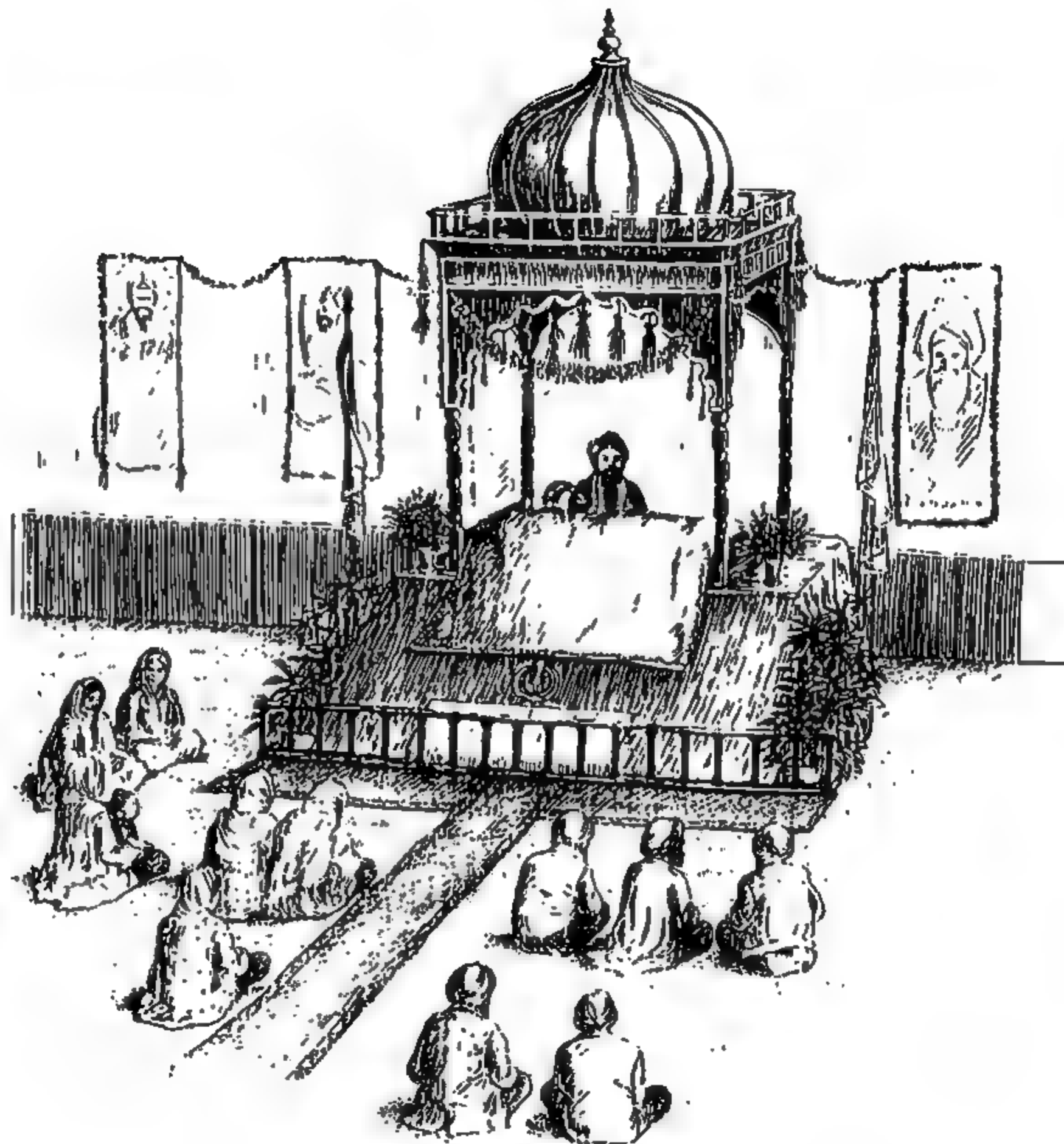
Men sit on one side, women on the other. They sit on the floor as a sign of humility and to show that all are equal before God.

There are no priests in Sikhism. Anyone (man or woman) may read from the Guru Granth Sahib, but today they may be trained readers or Granthis.



## Inside the Gurdwara

Like the religious buildings of other faiths, gurdwaras are not all identical but certain features are always present. In particular, they all have the dais (rakht) from which the Guru Granth Sahib is read, with the canopy above it. Pictures of the First and Tenth Gurus are invariably displayed, but not necessarily those of the other Gurus and not always as prominently as in this illustration.



## **Worship in the Gurdwara**

There is no set order of service (and no set time for worship). Music plays an important part (it is considered to be food for the soul). Kirtan is devotional music. Hymns and chants were written by Guru Nanak and his Muslim friend Mardana. Guru Arjan was also interested in music.

Ragees (musicians) play the Bajan (harmonium) and Tabla or Jovi (drums). The Sangat sing Nam (the holy word or God's praises). Nam is to be sung, spoken and meditated on.

At the end of the service Karah Parshad is shared by all. Made from equal parts of flour, sugar, butter and water the mixture is heated in an iron dish. One small portion is offered to the Guru Granth Sahib.

### **Recipe for Karah Parshad**

You will need two tablespoons each of flour or semolina, brown sugar, water and melted butter.

Mix the flour or semolina with the melted butter and cook over a low heat for about five minutes. Dissolve the sugar in the water and add gradually to the mixture. Cook, stirring all the time, until the substance leaves the side of the pan.

When cool, divide the mixture into small portions and eat with your hands.

## **Akhand Path**

Akhand Path is a special form of worship which involves the continuous reading (day and night) of the Guru Granth Sahib. It takes about 48 hours. It is usually done at the request of an individual or family, either as a thanksgiving for some special blessing or at a time of great sorrow or distress. Those who request the reading will normally be responsible for arranging a succession of readers and will make a donation to the Gurdwara according to their means. They will try to be present for as much of the reading as possible.



**Distributing Karah Parshad**



## THE SIKH EMBLEM

The Sikh emblem shown below will be found in a variety of forms outside and inside a Gurdwara. Outside it may be seen on a flag or on the noticeboard which tells the general public that this is a Gurdwara. Inside it may appear as a metal sculpture, often made of brass, or a wooden plaque. The whole emblem is called the Khanda, taking its name from the double-edged sword which forms its central axis. It is made up of three separate symbols.

### 1. The Khanda

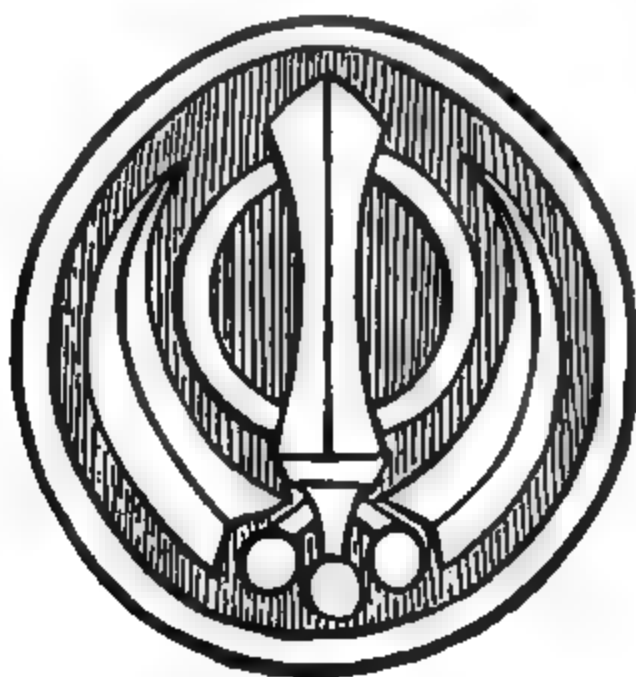
This is a special double-edged sword which represents the Supreme Truth, that is the One God.

### 2. The Chakra

This is the circle. Because a circle has no beginning and no end it represents the infiniteness of the One God. But because a circle marks the limit of the area within it, it also symbolises the need for Sikhs to remain within God's rule.

### 3. The Kirpans

The two swords are symbols of spiritual and political power. They remind Sikhs they must defend the truth.



## SIKH BELIEF

### The nature of God

#### 1. God is one.

The opening words of the Guru Granth Sahib say:

*There is one God,  
Eternal truth is his name.*

He is sometimes called NAM or SAT NAM (True Name).

#### 2. God is infinite and therefore beyond the human mind, and yet is to be found everywhere.

*O wise and all-knowing God, you are the river. How can I, the fish within you, measure your limits? Wherever I look I find no one but you, and if ever I were to leave you I would perish.*

*Why do you go to the forest to find God? He lives in all and yet remains distinct. He dwells in you as well, as fragrance resides in a flower or the reflection in a mirror. God abides in everything. See him, therefore, in your own heart.*

#### 3. God is a benevolent protector.

*My Lord is ever fresh, new, He is always benevolent.  
You are my Father, you are my Mother, you are my Protector everywhere.*

*He relieves the sufferings of the downtrodden;  
He is the protector of those without protection.*

### The human condition

#### 1. Human life is governed by the law of Karma which, in simple terms, means that you get what you deserve.

*Man's life proceeds as his accumulated actions determine it. He receives joy or sorrow in accordance with what his past deeds have earned. But all is good that comes from you.*

ੴ  
IK ONKAAR

There is one God

ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ  
SAT NAM

Eternal Truth is his Name

ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖ  
KARTA PŪRKH

Maker of all things

ਨਿਰ ਭਉ  
NIR BHAU

Fearing nothing

ਨਿਰ ਵੈਰੁ  
NIR VAIR

Hating nothing

ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ  
AKAAL MOORAT  
Immortal

ਅਜੂਨੀ  
AJOONI  
Unborn

ਸੈਭੰ  
SAIBHANG  
Self-existent

ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥  
GUR PARSAAD  
By the grace of the Guru, made known to men

2. For most people this means that they are constantly reborn because they are self-centred and misguidedly try to be self-reliant.

*In self-centredness man fails to perceive the true nature of liberation. In self-centredness there is worldly attachment and its shadow, doubt. By acting under the influence of self-centredness man causes himself to be born repeatedly. If he understands self-centredness he can find the door of liberation . . . He who sees the nature of the divine will perceive self-centredness also.*

#### Liberation

1. Liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth is achieved by a life of good deeds, but this can only be done by the grace of God.

*Good actions may procure a better existence, but liberation comes only from his grace.*

*By God's grace, O Nanak  
Man must either be saved or transmigrate.*

2. The good life which achieves release is not to be found by heroically striving after good works but by reflecting on the nature of God, summed up in his name.

*Sacrifices, burnt offerings, charity given to acquire merit, austerities, even worship, are all worthless and the body continues to endure suffering. Without the name of God there is no release. He who, with the Guru's help, meditates on the Name finds liberation. Without God's Name, birth into this world is fruitless. Without the Name, one eats poison, speaks evil, dies meritless and so transmigrates*

*Stubborn self-torture only wears out the body. Fasting and penance do not soften the soul. Nothing is as efficacious as the Lord's Name.*

3. In the quest for liberation it is important to have a Guru and to be surrounded by the brotherhood of faithful Sikhs.

*The Guru is the awakened God, awakening the sleeping God in his disciple.*

*The medicine of God's Name is within all of us  
But without the Guru, we do not know how to use it.*

*In good company one becomes good.*

*Just as the castor oil plant imbibes the scent of the nearby sandalwood, so the fallen become emancipated through the company of the faithful.*



## THE SIKH WAY OF LIFE

Sikhism is a way of life coupled with belief in the unity of God.

*The best of all the religions is  
To repeat the name of the Lord and do good deeds.*

Three fold service is required:

Physical (Tan)	Service to the community, e.g. assistance in the gurdwara, cleaning, cooking and repairs work.
Mental (Man)	Study of the Guru Granth Sahib and helping others to understand the teaching.
Material (Dhan)	The giving of alms and donations - contributions in money and food to the gurdwara (1/10th income). Building of hospitals, schools etc.

*There is nothing in me that is mine, everything is yours  
Offering you what is already yours, costs me nothing.*

The Gurus laid great stress on hard work and honest labour done with a sense of giving.

*Useless are the hands and feet if they do not serve humanity.*

Love for humanity is the only measure of devotion to God.

Many Sikhs will rise early, bathe and recite the Japji. The last prayer at the end of the day is the Kirtan Sohila which reminds the worshipper that life is short so time must be spent well. The aim of the disciplined life is to overcome self-centredness and submit to God's will.

The Japji describes five areas of experience or Khands:

Dharam Khand	religious duty
Gian Khand	divine knowledge
Saram Khand	spiritual endeavour
Karam Khand	fulfilment
Sach Khand	union with God

## RULES FOR THE SIKH

1. There are no food laws (though many Sikhs do not eat beef) except that Kosher and Halal meat is forbidden, that is, meat prepared for Jewish or Muslim use by ritual slaughter.
2. Cutting the hair is forbidden - also tobacco, intoxicants and drugs.
3. Adultery is forbidden.  

*You shall shower all your love on your wedded wife.* (Gobind Singh)
4. All men adopt the name Singh (lion) and all women the name Kaur (princess).
5. Except for the five Ks and the turban there are no restrictions on dress, but it should be simple. Women do not wear the veil but legs should be covered. Shalwar or trousers are usually worn with a knee length tunic, a kameez.

### In School

1. Rules of dress should be respected. Girls should be allowed to wear trousers and boys the tress-knot kerchief on the head.
2. Boys and girls should have separate swimming lessons. The boys' tress knot kerchief should be replaced after the lesson.
3. Adult Sikhs wear the Kirpan (see next page). Children may wear a miniature as a brooch or on a thread round the neck. These should not be removed.
4. Since some Sikhs do not eat beef, alternative food should be available. Some families are vegetarians but this is a matter of choice.

## THE FIVE KS

The Five Ks are part of the discipline of the Khalsa and are worn by all baptised Sikhs. They remind the wearer of the great Guru Gobind Singh and his ideals and of the brotherhood of all true Sikhs. The Five Ks are a constant reminder of what it means to be a Sikh.

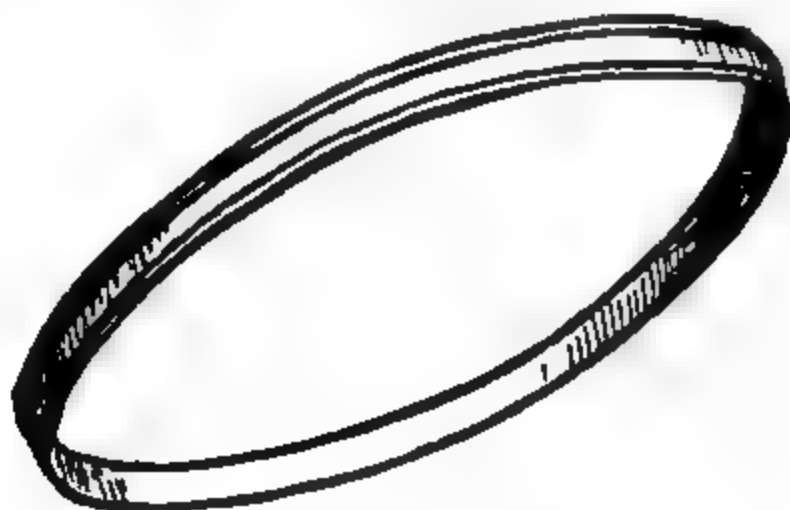
### Kaccha - short underpants

They signify the need for speed of movement and agility and are thus a symbol of readiness to defend the faith.



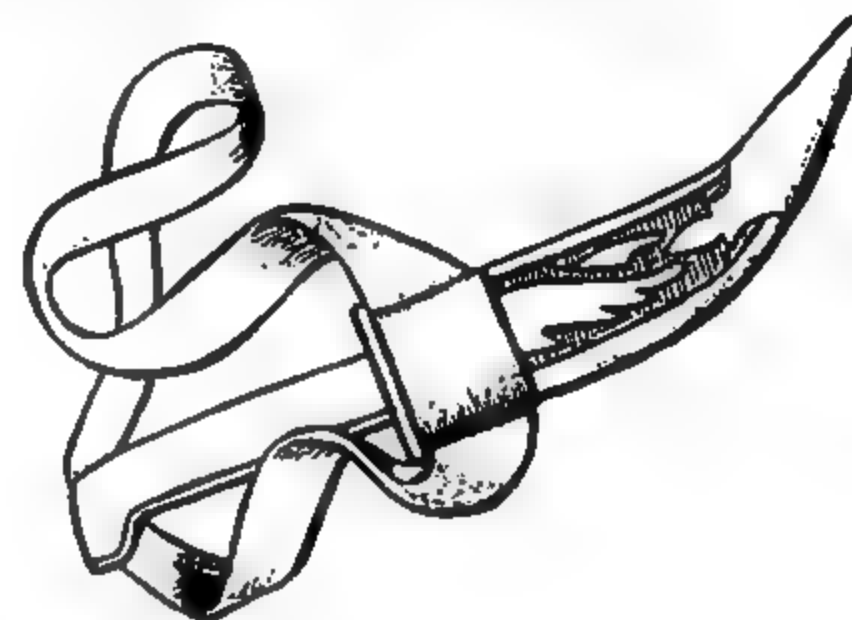
### Kara - bangle

Worn on the right wrist and made of steel, it is a symbol of the one-ness of God and the unity of the Sikh people.



### Kirpan - sword

This may be a ceremonial sword but as worn in daily life it is usually a short curved dagger. It is not meant to be an offensive weapon but a means of defending the faith if necessary. Many Sikhs now carry only a symbolic Kirpan in the form of a brooch or medallion.



### Kesh - long hair

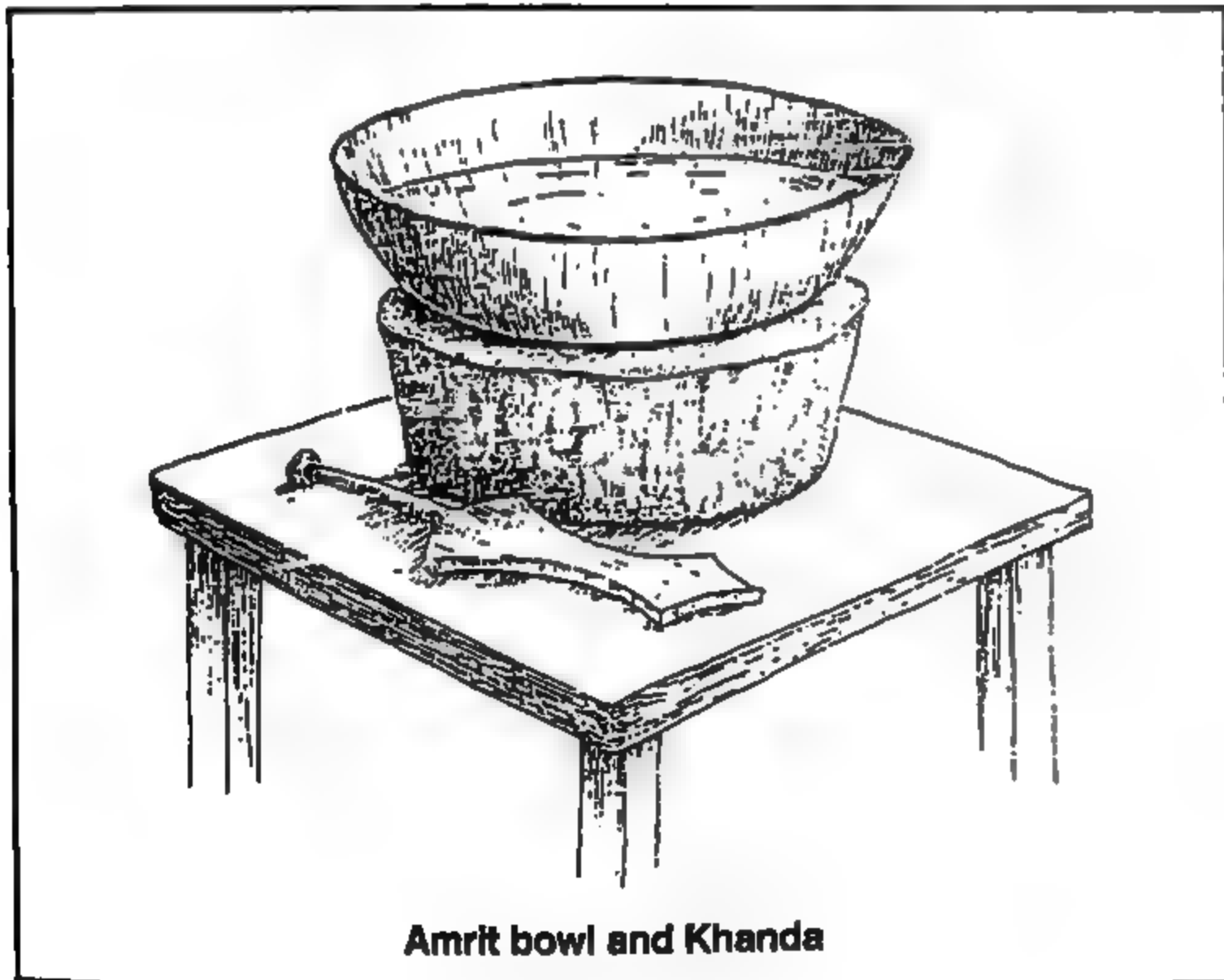
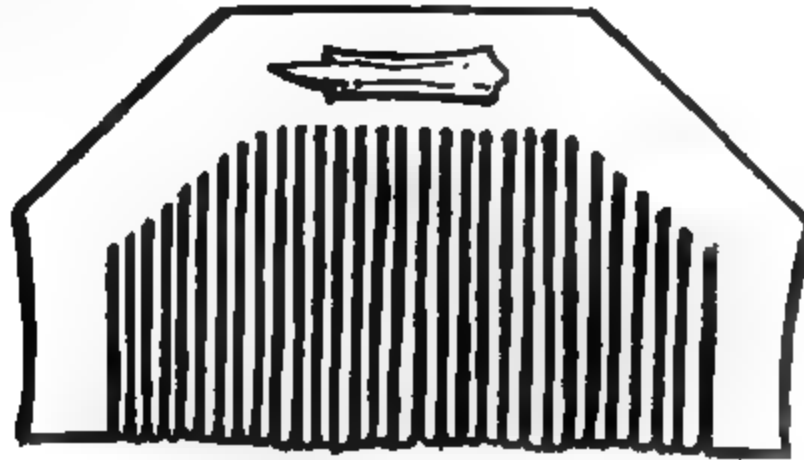
A mark of dedication and submission to God's will. In order to keep the long hair tidy it is covered with a turban. Consequently, although the turban is not itself one of the five Ks, it is in fact the aspect of Sikh dress which is most immediately obvious. For this reason many Sikhs would regard giving up the turban as equivalent to renouncing the faith. A turban may be worn as soon as a boy is able to tie it for himself.





### **Kangha - comb**

A comb is needed to keep the hair clean and hold it in place and is therefore a sign of cleanliness.



**Amrit bowl and Khanda**

## **SMAGAM (FUNCTIONS)**

Sikhs have few ceremonies. They are usually called Smagam.

### **Amrit Sanskar**

Initiation into the Khalsa usually takes place when a young person is between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Started in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh, five adult Sikhs (representing the five panji pyares) preside. They read in turn passages from the Guru Granth Sahib. The other four take up the warrior position, that is, kneeling with left knee on the ground and the right raised.

The amrit (water with honey or sugar) is stirred in the iron bowl by the five using the two edged sword or Khanda.

The initiate takes up the warrior position and five times amrit is poured into the hands to drink then five times sprinkled in the eyes (he should not blink) and on the head.

Five promises are made:

1. To wear the 5 Ks;
2. To follow the teaching of the Ten Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib;
3. To accept responsibility for service to the brotherhood;
4. To abstain from alcohol, tobacco and adultery;
5. To work hard and to give to charity.

A man is given the name Singh; a woman the name Kaur.

## **Anand Karaj - Ceremony of Bliss (Marriage)**

Many marriages are still arranged but usually with the consent of both parties. Both should be Sikhs.

### **Betrothal**

The male members of the families usually meet and exchange presents as do the women of the families. Gifts of jewellery are usually given to the bride.

### **Wedding**

The bride usually wears red shalwar and kameez or a sari with gold thread. She wears a dupatta over her face. The groom is garlanded.

The wedding takes place in the gurdwara. After bowing to the Guru Granth Sahib they sit cross-legged beside each other.

The responsibilities and duties of married life are explained by the person officiating. The bride holds the bridegroom's scarf or sometimes the bride's father ties the scarf to the end of her scarf. The groom leads the bride four times clockwise round the Guru Granth Sahib, once for each verse of the Lavan, a hymn written by Guru Ram Das. They are reminded that happiness is to be found in devotion to God. An ideal marriage is when 'They are not husband and wife who are joined only for physical contacts. Rather they are husband and wife who have one spirit in two bodies'.

At the end of the ceremony karah parshad is shared and gifts given to the couple.

Divorce and re-marriage are permitted but only after great efforts have been made to save the marriage, as divorce is against the teaching of the Guru.

## **Birth**

When a child is born, the opening words of the Guru Granth Sahib are whispered in the ear and amrit (honey) is placed on the tongue.

No name is given to the child until he or she is taken to the gurdwara to be presented to the Guru Granth Sahib. The Holy Granth is opened at random and the first letter of the first word on the page become the initial letter of the child's name.

## **Death**

Sikhs believe in the transmigration of souls, and view death as homecoming.

The Sohila or bedtime prayer is said over the body which is dressed in white. The Five Ks are put in the coffin.

The body is cremated and the ashes cast on to a river. The complete Guru Granth Sahib is read after the funeral. Prayers for the dead person and the family are said in the gurdwara. Mourning ends when the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib is completed.

No memorials are erected and the keeping of death anniversaries is forbidden.





**A Sikh wedding**

## HOLY PLACES

There are five places that are specially important for the Sikh. Nihangs are Sikhs who have the special responsibility of guarding the holy places.

**Amritsar - founded by the Fourth Guru, Ram Das.**

The name means 'pool of nectar'.

Guru Arjan built the Harimandir (House of God) in the middle of the pool. Its roof was gilded in the 19th century and so it came to be called the Golden Temple.

The four doors show that it is open to all and the steps down into the temple are symbolic of the need for humility.

Before entering the temple, pilgrims bathe in the pool.

Early copies of the Guru Granth Sahib are kept in the treasury and the holy book is read continuously in the temple.

Facing the Golden Temple is the Akal Takhat where religious and political conferences are held.

**Anandpur - in a valley at the foot of the Himalayas**

The head of Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru was buried here.

Originally a fortress built by Guru Gobind Singh, it was here that he instituted the Khalsa.

**Takht Sri Hazur in South India**

The place of Guru Gobind Singh's death.

In the treasury are kept many of the Guru's weapons. A horse like the one used by the Guru is kept in the stable and is taken in procession on the special days commemorating events in the Guru's life.

**Takht Nankana Sahib - near Lahore**

Guru Nanak's birth place.

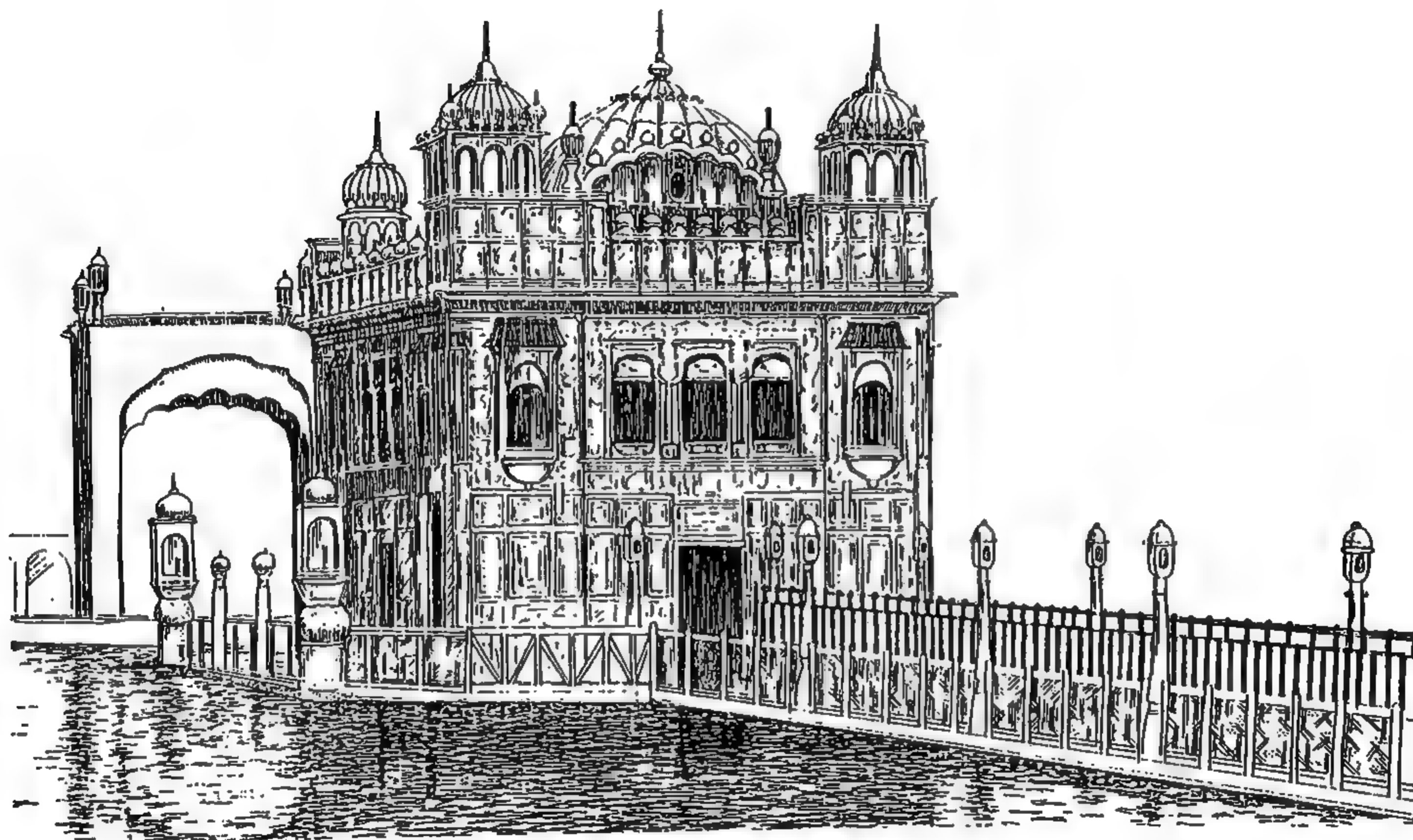
**Takht Sri Patna Sahib**

The birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh.

Although these holy places are important to the Sikh, pilgrimage to a holy place is not considered to be necessary.

*Pilgrimage, austerity, mercy, alms giving and charity  
Bring merit, be it as little as the mustard seed  
But he who hears, believes and cherishes the word  
An inner pilgrimage and cleansing is his meed.*

(Japji)



**The Golden Temple at Amritsar**



## **SIKH CELEBRATIONS**

No special day is observed each week. There are no feast or fast days.

### **Gurpurbs (Holidays)**

1. Birthdays of Guru Nanak (October/November) and Guru Gobind Singh (December).

Celebrations usually last three days, beginning with the continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib (this takes about 48 hours).

The Guru Granth Sahib is taken in a procession led by five men with swords representing the five beloved ones.

After the service in the Gurdwara a ceremonial meal is held.

The celebrations focus on all that Nanak said and taught rather than on his actual birth.

2. Martyrdoms of the Fifth Guru, Arjan (May/June) and the Ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur (November/December).

The Guru Granth Sahib is carried in procession as on Guru Nanak's birthday.

### **Melas (Celebrations and Fairs)**

1. Baisakhi - New Year (13 April)

This is one of the occasions when all Sikhs should come together. It celebrates the birthday of Sikhism and the founding of the Khalsa in 1699.

New clothes are worn; turbans may be exchanged. New flags are put up, and flag poles washed.

Games, dances, sports and competitions take place.

2. Diwali (October/November)

Similar to the Hindu celebration.

Celebrations last five days. It celebrates Rama's return from fourteen years in exile. For Sikhs it is a time to celebrate the release of the Sixth Guru (Har Gobind) from imprisonment in Delhi.

It is a family occasion; presents are exchanged. Houses are decorated with candles and lights.

3. Basant (January/February)

A celebration of Spring. Yellow is worn and yellow rice eaten.

4. Hola Mahall (February/March)

Held at the same time as the Hindu festival of Holi, it includes similar celebrations (e.g., the throwing of coloured water).

Introduced by Guru Gobind Singh in 1680, it was a time for horse fairs and military training. The first fair was held at Anandpur and lasted three days.

## **GLOSSARY**

The technical terms of Sikhism are often found in a number of variant spellings. In this publication we have tried to follow the usage employed in booklets produced by the Sikh community in Britain, but even these are not always consistent.

### **Adi Granth**

The literal meaning is 'original book'. The holy book of Sikhism, also known as the Guru Granth Sahib or the Holy Granth.

### **Akhand Path**

The continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib over a period of approximately 48 hours.

### **Amrit Sanskar**

Initiation into the khalsa, the brotherhood of Sikhism. Amrit is a nectar made of honey and water.

### **Anand Karaj**

The wedding ceremony.

### **Baisakhi**

The Sikh New Year (13 April), celebrating the formation of the Khalsa in the year 1699.

### **Chakra**

The circle which forms part of the Sikh emblem, signifying the infiniteness of God and the discipline of being a Sikh.

### **Chowri**

Made of yak hair and waved over the Guru Granth Sahib when it is being read, it is a sign of sovereignty.

### **Gurdwara**

Literally 'Guru's Door'. The Sikh place of worship. It should not be referred to as a temple. To do so is like calling a church a mosque.

### **Guru Granth Sahib**

The holy book of Sikhism, also known as the Adi Granth or the Holy Granth.

### **Granthi**

One who reads the Guru Granth Sahib during worship at a Gurdwara.

### **Japji**

The thirty-eight verse hymn by Guru Nanak which opens the Guru Granth Sahib.

### **Kaccha**

One of the Five Ks. Short underpants allowing freedom of movement and hence symbolising readiness to defend the faith which more restrictive clothing would make more difficult.

### **Kangha**

One of the Five Ks. The comb used to keep the long hair tidy.

### **Kara**

One of the Five Ks. The bracelet, made of steel and worn on the right wrist. A symbol of the one-ness of God and the unity of the Sikh people.

### **Karah Parshad**

A mixture of flour, butter, sugar and water shared by all after worship.

### **Kaur**

'Princess', the name given to all Sikh girls.

**Kesh**

One of the Five Ks. The uncut hair which symbolises submission to God's will.

**Khalsa**

The brotherhood of all baptised Sikhs.

**Khanda**

The Sikh emblem, taking its name from the double-edged sword which appears in the middle of it. The sword is also used in the initiation ceremony.

**Kirpan**

One of the Five Ks. The short sword carried as a symbol of readiness to defend the faith.

**Langar**

The kitchen attached to every Gurdwara, which serves free food to any who come.

**Mool Mantra**

The opening verse of the Guru Granth Sahib which expresses the essence of Sikh belief.

**Nishan Sahib**

The blue and yellow flag bearing the Sikh emblem which flies outside every Gurdwara.

**Panj Pyure**

The five 'beloved ones' who became the founding members of the Khalsa. Also the five members of the Khalsa who perform the Amrit ceremony today.

**Rakht**

The raised platform at the front of a Gurdwara from which the Guru Granth Sahib is read.

**Sikh**

Literally a learner or disciple. One who follows the teachings of the Gurus as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib.

**Singh**

'Lion', the name given to all Sikh boys.







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